

# If It's a Black Can, It Must Be Aircraft Soap!

By AM1(AW) Thomas Curda

**I**t was a Friday, and we were scheduled to wash an aircraft that afternoon. A few days earlier, I had gone to the hazmat minimization center (hazmin), had picked up the soap, and had stored it in my hazmat locker. The wash crews knew where I kept the soap, and I had no reason to think this wash would be any different. Boy, was I wrong!

Satisfied everything was OK, I went home for lunch, which is when everything headed south. The CDI who was in charge of the wash delegated her duties to a CDI in training. The latter came down to the tool room, saw a black can, and assumed it was aircraft soap—type V aircraft soap and paint-gun cleaning solution both come in black, five-gallon cans.

Knowing a half can would not be enough for a wash, the tool-room clerk ordered two more cans of this same solution from the hazmin center. When I came back from lunch, the maintenance-control chief was a little


angry with me because we had to order more soap. I told him I had picked up soap, and the wash crews knew it was stored inside the hazmat locker.

I was miffed the wash team had not used the soap in the locker, but we had another wash job in a few days, so the extra soap would be needed. I decided the issue wasn't worth pushing and moved on, so I could concentrate on a QA audit scheduled for that afternoon.

The audit went well, and I went home for an uneventful weekend. On Monday morning, I arrived at work and checked the tool room for "hazmat empties." I saw three cans of paint-gun cleaner and asked the tool-room clerk about the empty cans. He said the wash team had used them to wash an aircraft on Friday.

Realizing what had happened, I immediately told maintenance control, and they ordered the aircraft to be washed with aircraft cleaner.

After a call to the aircraft depot, the engineers determined the paint job probably wasn't damaged because the paint-gun cleaner had been diluted with water. We were lucky. If the aircraft had needed a paint job, our mistake could have cost the Navy a small fortune. This near-disaster occurred because several maintainers didn't pay attention.

What lesson did we learn? Even if you have been in the hazmat business for a few years and know all the military specifications, don't assume your people do. You must issue hazmat only to qualified people and must strive continuously to train junior maintainers. 

Petty Officer Curda wrote this article when he was the hazmat petty officer at VP-46. He since has transferred to AIMD, NAS Lemoore.

Containers often look the same. It pays to read the label and to check the MSDS before using any hazmat.

